



Cornell University

John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines

Document Title: Transitions Exercise

Author: Patricia Clark

Course: History 106

Course Title: African life histories

Year of Award: Spring 2003

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to make

→ Spring 2003 Knight Award for Writing Exercises

The Knight Award for Writing Exercises recognizes excellence in short exercises designed to improve student writing. Appropriate topics may be drawn from the whole range of writing issues, large scale to small scale, such as development of theses, use of primary sources, organization of evidence, awareness of audience, attention to sentence patterns (e.g., passive/active voice; coordination/subordination), attention to diction, uses of punctuation, attention to mechanics (e.g., manuscript formats, apostrophes). Exercises may be developed for use in and/or out of class.

Submissions should comprise three parts:

- 1) *A copy of the handouts or instructions that go to students.*
- 2) *An explanation of the exercise and the principles behind it addressed to future instructors who may use the exercise.*
- 3) *If possible, an example of a response to the exercise. (Be sure to get the student's written permission to use it.)*

Submissions may range in length from one to four or five pages, and are due in 159 Goldwin Smith by **Friday, May 16**. No exceptions can be made.

Winning Writing Exercises will usually be included in the course packet for Writing 700 and will be posted on the Knight Institute website.

The two winning entries will receive \$350 each; honorable mentions (if any) will receive \$100.

→ Spring 2003 Knight Award for Writing Exercises

~Please print clearly~

Instructor's name Patricia Clark

Should I win a prize, I give the John S. Knight Institute permission to publish, quote from, and/or distribute copies of my writing exercise, and to distribute publicity to newspapers and other publications, local and/or national, about my winning the prize. I am also prepared to send an electronic version of my text to the Knight Institute (knight_institute@cornell.edu).

Transitions Exercise

Instructor's signature *Patricia A. Clark* title of essay Date 5/15/03

Transitions Exercise

1) The handouts given to the students for this exercise follow, numbered 1a--the handout listing transitional expressions, and 1b--the handout which consists of paragraphs from two different works in which the sentences have been placed out of order. The handout labeled 1c gives the sentences in their correct order as paragraphs from Nelson Mandela's Long Walk to Freedom and Ellen Kuzwayo's Call Me Woman.

The first part of class was devoted to discussion of transitional expressions: what they are, what they do, and how to use them as transitions between paragraphs. Then students turned to drafts of their own essays and identified where they could utilize transitions between paragraphs, or, if they already used transitions in their essays, substituted different transitional phrases from the handout.

Next, we turned to transitions at a more micro level. After dividing the class into groups of two and passing out handout 1b, I asked students to:

1. put the paragraphs in the correct order;
2. try to identify the author of the paragraph, given the information that the paragraphs were from the books they were reading for the course (they didn't have much choice at that point in the semester--the authors had to be Mandela, Kuzwayo, or another Southern African author, Mpho 'M'atsepo Nthunya);
3. have one person in the dyad write an explanation of why they put the sentences in the order that they did;
4. have the other person in the dyad be able to explain orally to the class their justification for their sentence order.

The Kuzwayo paragraph was part of their reading assignment for the week (although most didn't remember it), and the Mandela paragraph was in the assigned reading for the following week.

After the groups had had sufficient time to work (about 15 minutes), we discussed how, having already read a great deal by both Mandela and Kuzwayo, the reader could identify the author of each paragraph based on their writing styles. Then the representative from each group had to report to the class why they felt the paragraph should be ordered in the way it was. Lively discussion ensued, but no consensus was reached on which sentence order was "correct"--there were at least three different variations for each paragraph. I then passed out

the handout with the sentences reproduced in order as paragraphs, so students could more easily see how the transitions within the paragraphs worked.

The entire sequence (discussion of transitional expressions handout, personal work on using transitional expressions, sentence re-ordering exercise, and discussion of the exercise) took most of the 75-minute class period.

2) This exercise was not so much an exercise in writing per se, but an exercise in helping students recognize clarity and flow within writing. It also had another pedagogical purpose--to start students thinking about the topic of their next essay (Education in South Africa), through presenting them with the views of two different authors on the same subject.

The principle of breaking down a paragraph by scrambling its sentences and asking students to rearrange the sentences in a logical order could be used in any writing seminar. By using two examples with the same topic, one that flowed well and one that didn't flow quite so smoothly, students had a basis of comparison for what constituted "good" writing. From a purely practical standpoint, the assignment would have been easier for the students if I had given them the sentences on cards which they could shuffle around to put in the correct order.

3) Unfortunately, I don't have examples of students' responses to this exercise. I often did not collect in-class exercises, but let students keep them for their own review. However, the exercise generated a great deal of class discussion: some students argued vehemently for their order of the sentences, while other patiently explained, step-by-step, why the sentences had to be in the given order. Through their own writing as well as discussion with each other, students came to see that clear paragraphs contain transitional expressions within the paragraphs themselves; transitional expressions are not reserved exclusively for movement from one paragraph to another.

1a

Transitional expressions**To ADD OR SHOW SEQUENCE**

again, also, and, and then, besides, equally important, finally, first, further, furthermore, in addition, in the first place, last, moreover, next, second, still, too

To COMPARE

also, in the same way, likewise, similarly

To CONTRAST

although, and yet, but, but at the same time, despite, even so, even though, for all that, however, in contrast, in spite of, nevertheless, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the other hand, regardless, still, though, yet

To GIVE EXAMPLES OR INTENSIFY

after all, an illustration of, even, for example, for instance, indeed, in fact, it is true, of course, specifically, that is, to illustrate, truly

To INDICATE PLACE

above, adjacent to, below, elsewhere, farther on, here, near, nearby, on the other side, opposite to, there, to the east, to the left

To INDICATE TIME

after a while, afterward, as long as, as soon as, at last, at length, at that time, before, earlier, formerly, immediately, in the meantime, in the past, lately, later, meanwhile, now, presently, shortly, simultaneously, since, so far, soon, subsequently, then, thereafter, until, when

To REPEAT, SUMMARIZE, OR CONCLUDE

all in all, altogether, as has been said, in brief, in conclusion, in other words, in particular, in short, in simpler terms, in summary, on the whole, that is, therefore, to put it differently, to summarize

To SHOW CAUSE OR EFFECT

accordingly, as a result, because, consequently, for this purpose, hence, otherwise, since, then, therefore, thereupon, thus, to this end, with this object

from The Little, Brown Handbook, 7th ed. (1998), p. 100-01

Make sure your transition indicates a turn in your essay, and isn't a stalling device. DON'T use a transition sentence like the one below!

"Now that we have examined these facts, we can look at some others that are equally central to an examination of this important issue."

It was intellectual "*baasskap*," a way of institutionalizing inferiority.

Under the act, African primary and secondary schools operated by the church and mission bodies were given the choice of turning over their schools to the government or receiving gradually diminished subsidies; either the government took over education for Africans or there would be no education for Africans.

The act transferred control of African education from the Department of Education to the much loathed Native Affairs Department.

In 1953, the Nationalist-dominated Parliament passed the Bantu Education Act, which sought to put apartheid's stamp on African education.

African teachers were not permitted to criticize the government or any school authority.

When I see the quality of teachers produced by Bantu Education and training, I bow my head in shame; that an Act like this can come from a so-called "Christian" government!

Lovedale was certainly an ideal example of the type of school provided by the missions for the black community in South Africa.

The truth is, it is reinforcing and maintaining the *status quo* servant:master relationship between blacks and whites in South Africa.

The detested Bantu Education (and its successors) introduced by the Nationalist government in 1953, in contrast, provides no education at all; it seeks only to suppress talent, to lower morale, and to produce obedient servants to carry out instructions without question, even when urgently needed.

1c

[correct order of sentences on worksheet: 5, 3, 2, 1, 4]

from Nelson Mandela, Long Walk to Freedom (1995), page 167

In 1953, the Nationalist-dominated Parliament passed the Bantu Education Act, which sought to put apartheid's stamp on African education. The act transferred control of African education from the Department of Education to the much loathed Native Affairs Department. Under the act, African primary and secondary schools operated by the church and mission bodies were given the choice of turning over their schools to the government or receiving gradually diminished subsidies; either the government took over education for Africans or there would be no education for Africans. African teachers were not permitted to criticize the government or any school authority. It was intellectual "*baasskap*," a way of institutionalizing inferiority.

[correct order of sentences on worksheet: 3, 1, 4, 2]

from Ellen Kuzwayo, Call Me Woman (1985), page 94

Lovedale was certainly an ideal example of the type of school provided by the missions for the black community in South Africa. The detested Bantu Education (and its successors) introduced by the Nationalist government in 1953, in contrast, provides no education at all; it seeks only to suppress talent, to lower morale, and to produce obedient servants to carry out instructions without questions, even when urgently needed. When I see the quality of teachers produced by Bantu Education and training, I bow my head in shame; that an Act like this can come from a so-called "Christian" government! The truth is, it is reinforcing and maintaining the status quo servant:master relationship between blacks and whites in South Africa.